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SOCIAL TRAPS AND THE PROBLEM OF TRUST

A 'social trap' is a situation where individuals, groups or organisations are unable to cooperate owing to mutual distrust and lack of social capital, even where cooperation would benefit all. Examples include civil strife, pervasive corruption, ethnic discrimination, depletion of natural resources and misuse of social insurance systems. People will cooperate only if they can trust that others will also cooperate. Much has been written attempting to explain the problem, but rather less material is available on how to escape it. In this book, Bo Rothstein explores how social capital and social trust are generated, and what governments can do about it. He argues that it is the existence of universal and impartial political institutions, together with public policies which enhance social and economic equality, that creates social capital. By introducing the theory of collective memory into the discussion, Rothstein makes an empirical and theoretical claim for how universal institutions can be established.

BO ROTHSTEIN is the August Röhss Chair in Political Science at Göteborg University in Sweden. Among his publications in English are *The Social Democratic State: The Swedish Model and The Bureaucratic Problems of Social Reforms* (Pittsburgh, 1996); *Just Institutions Matter: The Moral and Political Logic of the Universal Welfare State* (Cambridge, 1998); *Restructuring the Welfare State* (co-edited with Sven Steinmo, New York, 2002); and *Creating Social Trust in Post-Socialist Societies* (co-edited with Janos Kornai and Susan Rose-Ackerman, New York, 2004).

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theories of institutional design

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[More information](#)

To AnnChristin

Contents

<i>List of tables and figures</i>	page viii
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	ix
1 Reflections after a long day in Moscow	1
2 On the rational choice of culture	28
3 On the theory and practice of social capital	43
4 Social capital in the social democratic welfare state	71
5 How is social capital produced?	92
6 The problem of institutional credibility	129
7 Trust and collective memories	148
8 The transition from mistrust to trust	167
9 The conditions of trust and the capacity for dialog	201
<i>Bibliography</i>	212
<i>Index</i>	236

Tables and figures

Tables

5.1	Trust in social institutions in Sweden, 2000	<i>page</i> 110
5.2	Correlations between social trust and trust in social institutions, 1996–1999	111
5.3	Trust in others according to WVS 1995–1997 (world and Sweden)	113
5.4	Multivariate analysis of interpersonal trust	114
5.5	Factor analysis of dimensions in institutional trust	115
5.6	Correlations between social trust and trust in social institutions	116

Figures

3.1	Number of published scholarly papers on social capital, 1991–2003	44
4.1	Interest in working in voluntary organizations, 1955 and 1994	75
4.2	Opinions about trust in other people, 1981–1997	89
4.3	Interpersonal trust in Sweden, 1996–2002	90
5.1	Universal and selective benefits and generalized trust, 2000	125

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